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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Agricultural Research Administration
Washington 25, D. C.

Office of Administrator

July 27, 1953

STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 15

Identification of Material for Filing

The Office of Administrator, ARA, is a relatively small organization which, it would seem, would have simple filing problems. However, because of the wide scope of our subject matter and the large number of correspondents, our files present a considerable problem from the standpoint of both volume and complexity. In fact our records indicate that thousands of pieces of mail have to be handled each month. In order to facilitate the work of the people in the File Room and also to make file material readily available to members of the staff who need to consult it, all members of the staff are urged to cooperate in seeing that outgoing correspondence is so prepared as to minimize filing difficulties.

The principal difficulty encountered is the inadequate identification by subject of the material to be filed. Since our filing system is fundamentally a subject matter one, failure to have proper identification can greatly reduce the value of the system, and in some cases make it almost impossible to locate material. There have been several cases in which the subject has been indicated on outgoing correspondence simply as "Travel" or "Report." It is obvious that unless the file clerk happens to remember a particular document it will be exceedingly difficult to locate it under such a general description. It is requested, therefore, that in filling in the subject line on internal memoranda or in writing the first paragraph of letters intended to go outside the Department, an effort be made to describe the subject in such a way as to make it readily identifiable.

Difficulty also is caused when a staff member retains in his own office part of the file and sends only some of it to the File Room. Every staff member should bear in mind that persons other than himself may have occasion to consult a file and that if the entire file is not in the File Room persons consulting it will have at best an incomplete or inaccurate picture.

A third problem concerns the rather frequent practice of addressing a letter to Mr. John Smith and then indicating on the file copy "same letter to Mr. Henry Brown, Mr. Paul Jones, and Mr. Phillip Green." It is recognized that preparing separate carbon copies of the letters to each member of the group causes some extra work in the originating office, but if it is not done at that point it means either that there must be an elaborate system of cross-referencing in the File Room or

that replies coming in from persons other than the one to whom the first letter was addressed cannot be hooked up with outgoing correspondence. It is requested therefore that hereafter when identical letters are sent to a group of people the proper number of file copies of each outgoing letter be supplied. An exception to this rule would be in the case of a memorandum addressed to "ARA Bureau Chiefs." Correspondence of this kind is maintained in a single file so that a reply from each of the addressees could be properly connected with the outgoing correspondence.

While it is perhaps unnecessary to do so, it seems best to mention the necessity of changing carbon paper and re-inking stamp pads often enough so that all copies of correspondence may be clearly legible.

In order to help all members of the office to help themselves the File Room is being instructed to return to those who prepare correspondence file copies which for any reason are not in the proper shape to go into the files. The purpose of this is not to cause extra work or embarrassment but simply to insure that file material is in such shape as to be quickly and readily located when the need arises.

D. H. Fawcett
Acting Administrator

